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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 005166

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [UNGA](#) [SYRIA](#)

SUBJECT: ISOLATING SYRIA AT THE UN: TURKEY HAS INVITATION  
FOR PM; NO DECISION YET, CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT STILL ON

REF: SECSTATE 159137

Classified By: A/DCM James R. Moore, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) A/DCM and PolCouns delivered reftel demarche to Turkish MFA Middle East Director General Oguz Celikkol on September 2. Celikkol, who was already aware of the points based on USUN's demarche to the Turkish Mission to the UN, acknowledged that PM Erdogan had, indeed, received an invitation to meet with Syrian President Asad. The PM, Celikkol said, had not yet made a decision on whether to accept the invitation. (Comment: In the recent past, PM Erdogan's office has made decisions on contact with Asad without consulting with MFA, but we made the demarche at the political level as well - see para 5, below. End comment.)

2. (C) Celikkol reviewed Turkey's now-familiar arguments: While they understand the USG stance and share our specific concern with respect to Syria, Syria is a neighbor and the GOT feels a need to engage. When they engage, Celikkol emphasized, Turkish officials lay out all the regional concerns and press Syria for improvements. This applies, he added, to all the points raised in the demarche, with a focus on stability and democracy in Iraq, as well as Syria's attitude toward Israel. The GOT raised these concerns most recently approximately one month ago with Syrian DFM Mu'allim, when the discussions focused, per Celikkol, almost exclusively on Iraq and the need for Syria to control its border with Iraq. The GOT also pressed the Syrians on the importance of Sunnis playing constructive role in the Iraqi political process. For his part, when President Sezer traveled to Damascus, he had focused on convincing the Syrians to pull out of Lebanon.

3. (C) Celikkol himself raised the issue of Syrian President Asad's canceled "vacation" plans to Turkey, an issue he described as nearly two years old and currently on hold.

4. (C) With regard to President Asad, Celikkol, a former Turkish Ambassador to Damascus, restated that the Turks view the Syrian President as a man who is trying to effect reform, but who is in somewhat of a straightjacket by the Ba'athist hardliners. The GOT believes their contacts serve to strengthen Asad's hand vis-a-vis those hardliners. It is, Celikkol concluded, a balancing act, because when Damascus feels too isolated, Iranian influence there increases.

5. (C) Deputy PolCouns also made reftel points September 2 to PM Foreign Policy Advisor Ali Sarikaya, emphasizing that Syria's behavior runs counter to Turkish regional interests, including Turkey's vital interest in a stable, unified Iraq. Sarikaya professed to be unaware of any invitation from Asad. He undertook to pass our points to PM Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Davutoglu and to PM Erdogan.  
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